

# Frequently Asked Questions: AS and A-level Psychology

---

**Webinar:** AQA responses to questions asked during the webinar, Holistic marking for AS and A-level Psychology.

**Date:** 22 April 2016

*The following are a list of questions raised during the above webinar. Answers have been provided for your assistance:*

**Will I be able to access the presentation for reference, post-webinar?**

The presentation is available to access via <https://youtu.be/bec-cqeHmmw>

**What will be the 16 mark Assessment Objective breakdown for AO1, AO2 and AO3?**

For A-level papers 7182/1, 7182/2 and 7182/3 and maximum 16 mark questions, the Assessment Objective (AO) breakdown will be a maximum 6 AO1 marks with the remaining 10 marks being divided between AO2 and AO3.

**Why do we still have, for example, AO1=6/AO3=6 if we are only using levels not marks?**

Assessment Objectives are set by Ofqual and are the same across all AS and A-level Psychology specifications and all Awarding Organisations. Weightings for Assessment Objectives can be found in Section 5 of the specification. The allocation of Assessment Objectives per question will be stated at the back of each mark scheme.

Holistic marking will be applied in the assessment of student responses and the Levels of response mark bands will be used to determine the marks to be awarded.

**Where evaluation is absent (Level 1) but AO1 is very good (Level 4), what level would be chosen?**

Slide 24 of the presentation gave an example of the assessment of a response where knowledge (AO1) is evident but evaluation is missing.

In the above situation teachers/examiners would first need to consider the Assessment Objective weighting. For this 16 mark A-level question this would be AO1 = 6, AO3 = 10. This weighting determines the maximum number of marks that can be awarded for a knowledge only answer.

In the example on Slide 24 the focus of the answer is mainly on description. Any discussion or evaluation is only partly effective which means that this particular answer can only gain a maximum Level 2 mark.

**What level would be chosen for a response which presents “evaluation only”?**

It is hard to imagine that a response with an excellent evaluation would not display some knowledge of what is being evaluated.

With reference to the example on Slide 25, if a student's response consisted of only the last 4 paragraphs – evaluation only - you would need to ask yourself what knowledge of behavioural therapies the student's answer showed. This has been underlined in the text. You can see knowledge of both systematic desensitisation and flooding are present.

Comparing this response with the levels descriptors, it is at the top of Level 4 in all but the accuracy, detail and organisation of the outline of the behavioural approach to therapy for phobia. Given the AO3 weighting this response might arguably be awarded a mark at the bottom of Level 4 as a response that provided only the knowledge points underlined in the example, and therefore might have been awarded 3 marks in the Level 1 mark band.

**What is the difference between “some effective evaluation “(L3) and “evaluation being of limited effectiveness” (L2)**

At Level 3 there must be some evaluation that has been developed, for example, by being explained or elaborated in terms of consequences or implications. If evaluation is of limited effectiveness it is likely to consist of a series of simplistic statements of strengths or limitations, none of which have been explained or elaborated. Alternatively, it might be that the response consists of a relatively inconsequential but elaborated, evaluative point.

**What happens if the description element is very limited but the evaluation is good – how much are they penalised for not including the description element.**

Although students may not be able to access all marks available for a question, if an element is not covered in their answer they will not be penalised, ie marks will not be deducted.

**On a 12-mark essay question, are we not awarding 6 AO1 and 6 AO3 marks anymore? Are we now only using the levels?**

The breakdown of Assessment Objective marks for the AS papers 7181/1 and 7181/2 will be 6 AO1 and the remainder of marks divided between 6 AO2/3. To determine what mark a student should receive for a response the levels of response mark bands should be applied. The weighting of AOs for each paper features in Section 5 of the specification.

Having read and annotated the response, Teachers and Examiners will review the combination of qualities of the response to locate the appropriate level to be applied. They should adopt the following approach:

- Focus on the response as a whole and compare the response with the level descriptors, working from the bottom level up, until you reach the level descriptor that best matches the response.
- If the answer covers different levels you use a “best fit” approach to decide the level.
- The final step involves allocating an actual mark. Responses are generally variable so you will need to consider whether the material is closer to the level descriptor above or the level descriptor below. A level 3 response with some level 4 would be awarded a mark near the top of level 3.
- The most appropriate level is then assigned according to the overall quality of the response. Bear in mind the relative weightings of the assessment objectives and be careful not to over/under credit a particular skill. For example, if there is an equal balance of AO1 and AO3 then knowledge and evaluation should be ascribed equal weight in making a decision about the mark. If on the other hand AO3 is weighted more, as in an A-level essay, then this should be more influential in deciding on the mark.

**How many effective evaluative points/paragraphs (approximately) are expected for 10 marks AO2/3 at A level?**

There is no set formula for the number of evaluative points which students should reference in their A-level or AS level responses. Students should be encouraged to concentrate on answering the question that has been set.

**How many evaluation points would you expect a student to develop? One strength and one limitation?**

Students should respond to the question as set. In a question that requires evaluation students should be able to discuss strengths and limitations, unless the question specifically asks for one strength and one limitation only.

**Will there be more than one 12 mark question on a paper?**

We cannot stipulate how many 12 mark questions will be on an AS question paper.

**For stem questions – will answers be capped if they don't refer to the context in the scenario?**

If a response makes no reference to a scenario, ie no application, then there will be a maximum mark that can be awarded (ie capped). The maximum mark allowed will be stated in the mark bands. The actual amount awarded would vary depending on how much scope there was for application in the scenario materials.

**The specimen questions so far seem to vary in their balance between AO1/AO3 and how much is awarded for AO2 and it doesn't make it clear always what this balance is. Will this definitely be the case in the exams?**

The weighting for each Assessment Objective can vary. Please reference Section 5, Scheme of assessment in the specification for the overall weighting percentages for each Assessment Objective for each of Papers 1, 2 and 3.

**When a student is asked to discuss and evaluate (for example: animal studies) into attachment. How many studies should they refer to?**

Where studies are identified in the specification at AS and A-level, teachers should cover these during the course of study. Teachers have the flexibility to decide how many studies, in addition to those specified, to cover and to select material that will engage their students. Sufficient studies should be covered in order for students to be able to use research effectively and to generate coherent discussion. We therefore do not specify how many studies should be referred to.

**The space provided for answering is less, especially for 6 mark questions and a student's writing is large.**

The specimen question papers show the standard number of lines that will be provided in an examination paper ie two lines per paper. The number of lines provided for each question in a live assessment could be more than this as the anticipated detail of a response will be taken into account when papers are produced.

If a student needs more space to complete their answer during an examination they should request additional sheets from the invigilator. Students should not be encouraged to complete answers using any available white space on the question paper answer booklet.

**Is it OK for students to draw diagrams to help explain knowledge and understanding? For example, diagrams for models of memory.**

If appropriate, students may include diagrams to help explain their answers.

### **Can short answer questions be written without continuous prose – can they bullet point answers?**

The instructions on all question papers for AS and A-level will provide students with the following information:

- Questions should be answered in continuous prose. You will be assessed on your ability to:
  - use good English
  - organise information clearly
  - use specialist vocabulary where appropriate.

### **Do the maths marks overlap with the Research Methods marks? Or are they always allocated separately?**

At least 10% of marks require the use of mathematical skills. These skills will be applied in the context of Psychology through study of the specification content and practical research activities. It is therefore expected that the mathematical skills will be covered by the assessment of Research Methods. At least 25% of the overall assessment will assess the skills associated with Research methods.

### **When the question asks to discuss limitations, does this mean that they have to explain the limitation or evaluate the limitation?**

The Ofqual definition of the command word 'Discuss' states:

Present key points about different ideas or strengths and weaknesses of an idea.

Discussion generally involves presenting different viewpoints or a line of argument supported by evidence.

<http://www.aqa.org.uk/resources/psychology/as-and-a-level/psychology/teach/command-words>

### **Do we still have to focus on IDAs within essays?**

The Psychology A-level, Paper 3 covers the topic of issues and debates in psychology. The content of Paper 3 options contains areas of debate and having studied issues and debates separately this will help in developing understanding across Paper 3. Our third set of specimen assessment material (available on e-AQA) for 7182/3 features the following 16 mark question:

Discuss the nature-nurture debate in psychology. Refer to **at least two** topics you have studied in your answer.

**Do students need to know research studies to demonstrate the role/function of neurotransmitters and hormones for biopsychology?**

In a discursive essay students would get credit for knowing relevant studies. However, in the context of biopsychology, questions would not be asked on the description of research studies in relation to the role/function of neurotransmitters or hormones.

**Do you have to know the dates of research studies and/or the names to get full marks or just a referral to act as examples?**

Unless dates are mentioned in the specification content, it is not necessary for students to include these in an answer in order to access full marks. Students should concentrate on ensuring that their answer demonstrates their understanding, application and relevance to the question set.

**Should second year A level students be using a PEEL structure for AO3 in 16 essays?**

The PEEL (Point, Evidence, Explain, Link) structure for answering essay style questions is one method which teachers may recommend that students adopt when responding to a question requiring evaluation. However, students may use other methods and teachers are free to recommend other methods, as appropriate.

It is important for students to gain experience of answering essay style questions before examinations. Specimen assessment material available on our website provides this opportunity.

**Do students need to work out the standard deviation in the exam?**

No, we will **not** be asking students to calculate standard deviation on the new A-level Psychology exams.